

Child Fatality Review #08-09
Region 4
King County

This 15-year-old Native American female died from strangulation.

Case Overview

On February 17, 2008, this 15-year-old female was found dead by her father, her custodial parent. This teen girl arrived at her home around 2:30 a.m. She was intoxicated. Her father told law enforcement he got angry with her. She ran out of the house and hid under a vehicle in the driveway. Family members brought her back home and put her to bed. Family members reported sitting with her until she fell asleep (approximately 6:30 a.m.). The deceased youth's father reported he woke up about 12:00 noon. He checked on her at 1:30 p.m. and discovered she was dead. The county coroner initially determined that she likely died from acute toxicity from drugs and alcohol. Tests confirmed the youth had alcohol and drugs in her system. However, the King County Medical Examiner determined this was not the cause of death. There was evidence of mechanical asphyxiation and strangulation. The death has been certified as a homicide. The law enforcement investigation continues. No person has been arrested for this child's murder.

Referral History

The youth's mother is listed as the primary caretaker on 21 referrals, from April 14, 1998 through May 10, 2002. Fourteen referrals were screened accepted for investigation and seven were screened information only. The deceased youth is not listed as a victim in any of these referrals as she was raised by her paternal grandmother and later lived with her father. The referral history is on her father's home where the youth was living at the time of her death.

There was one referral on the father's home. This referral was received on April 16, 2007. The father contacted Children's Administration intake requesting Family Reconciliation Services (FRS). The father called reporting his daughter was out of control. The deceased youth was not attending school and was a chronic runaway. The father suspected she was using drugs. He reported she had attempted suicide. The father and grandmother requested assistance to file an At-Risk Youth (ARY) petition for the youth. The department opened the case for FRS. The assigned social worker made attempts to contact the family to address the at-risk issues. The father and grandmother (legal guardian) did not respond to the social worker's repeated phone calls and the case was closed.

Issues and Recommendations

Issue: The pending criminal investigation - there was no primary suspect identified at the time of the review. Several people, including the father, had an opportunity to harm the youth.

Recommendation: If this investigation results in the identification of the alleged perpetrator, Children's Administration will take appropriate action.

Issue: Sending letters to families to explain programs and resources.

Recommendation: In this case, the worker left phone messages, but did not send a letter to the family. In May or June 2008, this office decided to begin sending letters to families who requested FRS, but were not responding to phone calls from the assigned worker. The letter explains this voluntary program, as well as other resources. This is now the standard for the FRS program in the King South office. Children's Administration should consider implementing this practice statewide.